

Baba Guru Nanak – A Muslim Saint

By Ansar Raza

Thomas Patrick Hughes was a British missionary who worked in India from 1865 to 1884. He wrote many books including “*Dictionary of Islām*” wherein he added an article about “*Sikhism*”. The reason offered by him for adding an article about Sikhism in a book about Islam is that:

“...it is enough for the purposes of this article to have established the fact that Sikhism, in its inception, was intimately associated with Muhammadanism; and that it was intended as a means of bridging the gulf which separated the Hindus from the believers in the Prophet.”

The Promised Messiah^{as} mentioning this work of Reverend Hughes in his book “*Satt Bachan*” (The True Word) writes:

“As some papers run by Sikhs spread this misconception that this book was written with some bad intention or to hurt the feelings, therefore it is pertinent to state that this book is written with all the good intentions and after thorough research. The basic aim of this book is to highlight his great piety and spiritualism and he completely separated himself from Hindu Vedas. He found that the God presented by Islām sparkles with Majesty, Power, Holiness and is Omnipotent. And it is because of his great piety that he declared his belief in Islām. That is because we stated those cogent reasons and proves of his belief. This view was also supported by many British scholars. This is the reason that we have included in this book extracts from Dictionary of Islām page (583-591) by Reverend Hughes which clearly state that Guru Baba Nanak was converted to Islām.” (Satt Bachan, inside title page, Rūhanī Khaza`in, vol-10, p.112)

The Promised Messiah^{as} wrote this book, in 1895, refuting the allegations levelled against Bābā Nānak by Swāmi Dayānand Sarsawati, the Founder of ‘*Arya Samāj*’ sect of Hindūs, in his book “*Satyārath Parkāsh*”, clearing the mythological tales about Bābā Nānak, and further proving that he was a Muslim saint. To further the cause and mission of the Promised Messiah^{as}, it is pertinent to present before next generations those sources he quoted.

In this humble effort, some relevant passages from the article “*Sikhism*” written by Reverend Hughes in his book “*Dictionary of Islām*” are being reproduced here to have more information about this subject. As

mentioned above in his book, the Promised Messiah^{as} has discussed three aspects of Bābā Nānak's life:

- **Refuting allegations leveled by Swāmi Dayānand;**
- **Clearing mythological and superficial tales from his biography; and**
- **Proving that Baba Nanak was a Muslim saint.**

However, in this article, only one of the above aspects is being discussed, i.e., "Bābā Nānak was a Muslim saint."

In the introduction, Reverend Hughes writes that Bābā Nānak intended to create a bridge and make a compromise between Hindūs and Muslims:

The literature and traditions of Sikhism present a strange intermingling of Hindū and Muhammadan ideas; and this is so palpably apparent that even superficial inquirers have been led to conclude that Nānak purposely intended his creed to be a compromise between those two great religions.

A careful investigation of early Sikh traditions points strongly to the conclusion that the religion of Nānak was really intended as a compromise between Hindūism and Muhammadanism, if it may not even be spoken of as the religion of a Muhammadan sect. The very little that seems to be known as to the views of the early Sikh teachers, coupled with the decided opinion put forth by Dr. Trumpp, has made it necessary to give here a longer article on Sikhism than its importance with respect to Islām would have otherwise warranted; because it was necessary to establish the relationship which actually existed between the two faiths. It will be seen that the information given in this article is chiefly taken from original Panjabī books, and from manuscripts in (the India Office Library; and it is supported by the authority of the Ādi Granth, which is the sacred canon of the Sikhs.

Regarding the origin of Sikhism, Reverend Hughes is confident that it emerged out of Sufism and that Bābā Nānak was himself a Sufī. He writes:

The Janam-Sākhīs, or biographical sketches of Nānak and his associates, contain a profusion of curious traditions which throw considerable light on the origin and development of the Sikh religion. From these old books we learn that, in early life, Nānak, although a Hindu by birth, came under Sufī influence, and was strangely attracted by the saintly demeanour of the faqīrs who were thickly scattered over Northern India and swarmed in the Punjab...It is, therefore, only reasonable to suppose that any Hindū affected by Muhammadanism would show some traces

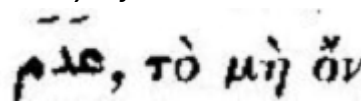
of Sufi influence. As a fact, we find that the doctrines preached by the Sikh Gurus were distinctly Sufistic and, indeed, the early Gurus openly assumed the manners and dress of faqirs, thus plainly announcing their connection with the Sufistic side of Muhammadanism. In pictures they are represented, with small rosaries in their hands, quite in Muhammadan fashion, as though ready to perform zikr.

Reverend Hughes further writes that though Guru Arjun, the fifth Guru was the first to lay aside the dress of a faqir in the doctrines but the Sufi terminologies were still used by all the Gurus. Like Sufis, Guru Granth mentions God as the Only Deity; the True One; the Light; the Beloved One; and many other similar expressions found both in the Sufi literature and Guru Granth Sahib. Even the manner of compilation, states Reverend Hughes, is a remarkable proof of Sufi influence. He writes:

Another remarkable proof of Persian influence is found in the form of the Adi Granth itself. It consists of a collection of short poems, in many of which all the verses composing the poem rhyme together, in singular conformity with the principle regulating the construction of the Persian ghazal. This resemblance is rendered more striking by the fact that the name of Nanak is worked into the composition of the last line of each of the poems. This last characteristic is too persistent to be considered the result of accident, and while it is altogether foreign to the practice of Hindu verse, it is in precise accord with the rule for the correct composition of the ghazal. The foregoing facts seem conclusive as to time influence of Persian Sikhism on the origin of the Sikh religion

Reverend Hughes quotes Dr. Trumpp (the first translator of Gūrū Granth Sahib), who, while discussing the philosophy of the *Adi Granth*, admits the intimate connection between Sikhism and Sufiism in the following words:

"We can distinguish in the Granth a grosser and a finer kind of Pantheism.... In this finer shade of Pantheism, creation assumes the form of emanation from the Supreme (as in the system of the Sufis); the atomic matter is either likewise considered co-eternal with the Absolute and immanent in it, becoming moulded into various, distinct forms by the energizing vigour of the absolute joti (light) or, the reality of matter is more or less denied (as by the Sufis, who call it

the  *so that the Divine joti is the only real essence in all."*(Introduction to Translation of the *Adi Granth*, pp c. ci)

Further in his article, Reverend Hughes quotes Dr. Trumpp admitting the influence of Islām on Sikhism:

“It is not improbable that Islām had a great share in working silently those changes, which are directly opposed to the teaching of the Gurus.”— (Introduction to Translation of the Adi Granth, p. cxii.) The teaching of Nanak was, however, very practical. His followers are daily reminded in the Jap-Ji that; “Without the practice of virtue there can be no worship.”

Reverend Hughes quotes many passages of Guru Granth wherein not only a plain claim of kinship with the Sufīs, but the incorporation of several of their favourite terms is found.

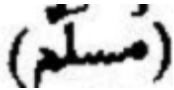
Besides Guru Granth Sahib, Reverend Hughes also presents evidences from Janam-Sakhis (biographies of Bābā Nānak) to prove his point. He studied these Janam-Sakhis from oldest manuscripts he found in India Office Library in London, U.K. He writes:

The traditions of Nanak preserved in the Janam-Sakhi, are full of evidences of his alliance with Muhammadanism. He was a Hindu by birth, of the Vedi Khattri caste; and was the son of the patwari, or village accountant, of the place now called Nankana, in the neighbourhood of Lahore. In his very early days, he sought the society of faqirs, and used both fair and unfair means of doing them service, more especially in the bestowal of alms. At fifteen years of age, he misappropriated the money which his father had given him for trade, and this induced his parents to send him to a relative at Sultanpur, in order that he might be, weaned from his affection for faqirs (India Office MS No 1728, fol. 29). His first act in his new home was to join the service of a Muhammadan Nawab, named Daulat Khan Lodi; and, while serving him, he continued to give to faqirs all his salary, except the bare maintenance he reserved for himself. While in the service of this Muhammadan, Nanak received the ecstatic exaltation which he felt to be Divine inspiration. It is stated in the tradition of his life that Nanak went to the river to perform his ablutions, and that whilst so engaged, he was translated bodily to the gates of Paradise. “Then a goblet of amrita (the water of life) was given (to him) by command (of God). The command was ‘This amrita is the goblet of my name; drink thou it.’ Then the Guru Nanak made salutation, and drank the goblet. The Lord (Sahib) had mercy (and said) Nanak, I am with thee, I have made thee happy, and whoever shall take thy name they all shall be rendered happy by me. Go thou, repeat my name, and cause other people to repeat it. Remain uncontaminated from the World. Continue (steadfast) in the

name, in alms-giving, in ablutions, in service, and, in the remembrance (of me). I have given to thee my own name: do thou this work.” (fol. 33) Here we have notions closely akin to those of the Sufis, who lay much stress on the repetition of the name of God, which they term ZIKR, on religious ablutions [WAZU] and on meditating on the unity of God [WAHDANIYAH]

Reverend Hughes further states those incidents that happened after this experience when Bābā Nānak was summoned by his employer and investigated about his utterances. It is stated that Bābā Nānak then proceeded to offer prayer with the whole congregation and the news spread in the town that Bābā Nānak has become Muslim.

No sooner had Nanak recovered from his trance than he uttered the key-note of his future system in the celebrated phrase, “There is no Hindu, and there is no Musalman” (fol. 36) The Janam-Sakhi then goes on to say that, “The people went to the Khan (his former employer) and said, ‘Baba Nanak is saying, there is no Hindu, there is no Musalman. The Khan replied, ‘Do not regard his statement, he is a faqir.’ A Qazi sitting near said ‘O Khan! It is surprising that he is saying there is no Hindu and no Musalman.’ The Khan then told an attendant to call Nanak, but the Guru Nanak said ‘What have I to do with the Khan?’ Thou the people said ‘This stupid is become mad.’... Then the Baba (Nanak) was silent. When he said anything, he repeated only this statement ‘There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman.’ The Qazi then said ‘Khan is it right that he should say, there is no Hindu, there is no Musalman. ‘Then the Khan said ‘Go, fetch him.’ The attendant went, and said ‘Sir, the Khan is calling (you).’ The Khan says, ‘For God’s sake give me an interview [Panj aj bara Khuda, i de tan,i = Persian az bara,i Khuda, I want to see thee.’ The Guru Nanak arose and went, saying ‘Now the summons of my Lord (Sahib) us come, I will go’ He placed a staff upon his neck and went. The Khan said ‘Nanak, for God’s sake take the staff from off thy neck, gird up thy waist, thou art a good faqir’ Then Guru Nanak took the staff from off (his) neck, and girded up his loins. The Khan said ‘O Nanak, it is a misfortune to me that a steward such as thou shouldst become a faqir.’ Then the Khan seated the Guru Nanak near himself and said ‘Qazi, if thou desirest to ask anything, ask now; otherwise this one will not again utter a word.’ The Qazi becoming friendly smiled and said: ‘Nanak what dost thou mean by saying ‘There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman?’ Nanak replied: ‘to be called a Musalman is difficult; when one (becomes it) thou he may be called a Musalman. First of all, having made religion (din) sweet, he clears away Musalman wealth. Having become

firm  *in religion (din) in this way brings, to an end the revolution of*

dying and, living.'— (I.O., MS., 2484, fol. 84.) When Nanak had uttered this verse, the Qazi became amazed. The Khan said: 'O Qazi, is not the questioning of him a mistake?' The time of the afternoon prayer had come. All arose and went (to the mosque) to prayers, and the Baba (Nanak) also went with them." Nanak then demonstrated his supernatural power by reading the thoughts of the Qazi. "Then the Qazi came and fell down at his feet, exclaiming, 'Wonderful, wonderful! on this one is the favour of God.' Then the Qazi believed; and Nanak uttered. this stanza: 'A (real) Musalman clears away self; (he possesses) sincerity, patience, purity of speech': (what is) erect he does not annoy: (what) lies (dead) he does not eat. O Nanak! That Musalman goes to heaven (bihisiht).' When the Baba had uttered this stanza, the Saiyids, the sons of the Shaikhs, the Qazi, the Mufti, the Khan the chiefs and leaders were amazed. The Khan said: 'Qazi Nanak has reached the truth'; the additional questioning is a mistake.' Wherever the Baba looked, there all were saluting him. And the Baba had recited a few stanzas, the Khan came, and fell-down at his feet. Then the people, Hindus and Musulmans, began to say to the Khan that God (Khuda) was speaking in Nanak." (India Office MS 1728, fol. 36-41)

From the foregoing it is perfectly clear that the immediate successors of Nanak believed that he went very close, to Muhammadanism; and we can scarcely doubt the accuracy of their view of the matter, when we consider the almost contemporaneous character of the record, from which extracts have been given, and the numerous confirmatory evidences contained in the religion itself... Another significant fact is that when Nanak speaks of himself as the servant of God, he employs the word Khuda, 'a Persian Muhammadan term, but when his brother-in-law Jairam speaks of God, he uses the Hindu word. Paramesur. It will, also, be noticed that Muhammadans are affected by the logic and piety of Nanak, and to them he shows himself so partial that he openly accompanies them to the mosque, and thereby causes his Hindu neighbours and friends to believe that he is actually converted to the faith of Islām. But, of course, the most remarkable expression of all is the emphatic and repeated announcement that "There is no Hindu, there. is no Musalman." This can mean nothing else than that it was Nanak's settled intention to do away with the differences between those two forms of belief, by instituting a third course which should supersede, both of them.

Reverend Hughes further writes that while meeting Muslim dervishes, Guru Nanak used to greet them with Islāmic greeting of "Assalam-o-Alaikum" and receiving back the same greeting of "Wa-Alaikum-Assalam". Then Reverend Hughes describes the intimate and close relationship of Guru Nanak with Shaikh Farid that lasted for twelve years. Sometimes this Shaikh

farid is mistaken as Babafarid Shakar-Ganj who had passed away much earlier than Guru Nanak. Reverend Hughes writes:

The most significant associate which Nanak found was, undoubtedly, Shaikh Farid...This strict Muhammadan became the confidential friend and companion of Nanak; and if all other traditions had failed, this alone would have been enough to establish the eclectic character of early Sikhism The first greeting of these famous men is significant enough, Shaikh Farid exclaimed, "Allāh, Allāh, O Darvesh", to which Nanak replied, "Allāh Is the object of my efforts, O Farid! Come, Shaikh Farid Allāh, Allāh (only) is over my object" The words in the original being Allāh, Farid, juhdi; hamesa au, Sekh Farid, juhdi Allāh Allāh (India Office MS, No 1728; fol. 86.) The use of the Arabic term juhdi implies the energy of the purpose with which he sought for Allāh; and the whole phrase is forcibly Muhammadan in tone.

An intimacy at once sprang up between these two remarkable men; and Shaikh Farid accompanied Nanak in all his wanderings for the next twelve years. The intended compromise between Hinduism and Islām is shown not only in the fact of this friendship but in the important circumstance that no less than 142 stanzas composed by Shaikh Farid are admitted into the Adi Granth itself. An examination of these verses still further proves the mingling of the two religions which Nanak effected....The fact that the compositions of a genuine Sufi should have been admitted into the canonical book of the Sikhs, and that they should contain such a clear admixture of Hindu and Muhammadan ideas, is conclusive evidence that Nanak, and his immediate successors, saw no incongruity in the mixture. As soon as Nanak and his friend Shaikh Farid begin to travel in company, it is related that they reached a place called Bisi ar, where the people applied cow-dung to every spot on which they had stood, as soon as they departed (I.O MS, No 1728, fol. 94) The obvious meaning of this is, that orthodox Hindus considered every spot polluted which Nanak and his companion had visited. This could never have been related of Nanak had he remained a Hindu by religion.

Reverend Hughes also describes the meetings of Bābā Nānak with Shaikh Ibrahim, who saluted him as a Muslim, and had a conversation with him on the unity of God; Miyan Mitha, who called upon him for the *Kalimah* which leads to a long conversation, in which Bābā Nānak lays emphasis on the Sufi doctrine of the unity of God. In this conversation, Nanak says, "The book of the Qur'ān should be practised." (fol.144) He also acknowledged that "justice is the Qur'ān." (fol. 148) When the Miyan asked him what is the one great name, Nanak took him aside and whispered it his ear, "Allāh".

Immediately the great name is uttered, Miyan Mitha is consumed to ashes; but a celestial voice again utters the word Allāh!" and the Miyan regains life, and falls at the feet of Nanak. (fol. 147)

Regarding pilgrimage to Mecca by Guru Nanak, Reverend Hughes writes:

In precise conformity with this deduction is the tradition of Nanak's pilgrimage to Mecca. The particulars of his visit to that holy place are fully given, in all accounts of Nanak's life, and although, as Dr. Trumpp reasonably concludes, the whole story is a fabrication, yet the mere invention of the tale is enough to prove that those who most intimately know Nanak considered his relationship to Muhammadanism sufficiently close to warrant the belief in such a pilgrimage in the course of his teaching in Mecca, Nanak is made to say: "Though men, they are like women, who do not obey the Sunnat, and Divine commandment, nor the order of the book (i.e. the Qur'an)". (I.O. MS. No. 1728, fol. 212.) He also admitted the intercession of Muhammad, denounced the drinking of bhang, wine, &c., acknowledged the existence of hell, the punishment of the wicked, and the resurrection of mankind; in fact, the words here ascribed to Nanak contain a full confession of Islām. These tenets, are, of course, due to the narrator of the tale, and are only useful as showing how far Nanak's followers thought it possible for him to go.

In an interesting story, a Muslim saint tells his disciples that the Muslims of his time have become be-iman (faithless and now a Hindū is entering Behisht (Paradise). Narrating this story, Reverend Hughes writes:

A curious incident is next related to the to the effect that Makhdum Baha' u 'd-Din, the Pir of Multan, felling his end approaching, said to his disciples, "O friends, from this time the faith of no one will remain firm; all will become faithless (be-iman)." His disciples asked for an explanation; and in reply he delivered himself of an oracular statement: "O friends, when one Hindu shall come to Heaven (bihisht), there will be brilliancy (ujala) In Heaven." 'To this strange announcement his disciples replied: "Learned people' say that Heaven is not decreed for the Hindus; what is this that you have said?" (I.O. MS. 1728, fol. 224.) The Pir told them that he was alluding to Nanak; and sent one of his disciples to ask Nanak if he, also, had received an intimation of his approaching death.

In this anecdote we have the extraordinary admission from a Muhammadan that Nanak would succeed in breaking up the faith of Islām. It is in consequence of a Hindu's having conquered Heaven itself, and vindicated his right to a place in the

paradise of Muhammad, that those who were then in the faith of the Prophet would lose confidence in his teaching. . Here again, the words employed are useful; for the Pir is made to say that Muslims will become be-iman, the Arabic term specially applicable to the "faith" of Islām; and Heaven is called in the Panjabi story bhisat, that is bihisht, the Paradise of Muhammadans [see PARADISE]; for had the Hindu heaven been intended, some such word as swarg, or paralok, or Brahmaloḥ would have been used.

It is also very well known that the Hindus and the Muslims disputed regarding the final rites of Guru Nanak when he died. Both wished to perform his funeral according to the teachings of their religions believing Guru Nanak to be one of them. Regarding this incident Reverend Hughes writes:

The final incident in the life of this enlightened teacher is in precise accord with all that has been said of his former career. Nanak came to the bank of the Ravi to die — in conformity with Hindu custom — by the side of a natural stream of water. It is expressly said that both Hindus and Muslims accompanied him. He then seated himself at the foot of a Sarib tree, and his Assembly of the faithful (Sangat) stood around him...Then the Hindus and Musulmans who were firm in the name (of God), began to express themselves (thus) the Musalmans said, 'We will bury (him)'; and the Hindus said, 'We will burn (him).' Then, the Baba said, 'Place flowers on both sides; on the right side those of the Hindus, on the left side those of the Musalmans, (that we may perceive) whose will continue green tomorrow. If those of the Hindus keep green, then bury (me).' The Baba ordered the Assembly to repeat the praises (of God); and the Assembly began to repeat the praises accordingly. [After a few verses had been recited] he laid down his head. When the sheet (which, had been stretched over him) was raised, there was nothing (under it): and the flowers of both (sides) remained green. The Hindus took away theirs; and the Musalmans took away theirs. The entire Assembly fell to their feet." (I.O. MS. 1728, fol. 239, 240.)

All of the above, a work done, not by any Muslim but by a non-Muslim; an evangelical priest; and an opponent of Islām, bear witness to the fact that Bābā Nānak was a true Muslim who inspired not only the Hindūs of his age but also the Muslims and drew their attention towards the real teachings of Islām.